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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002485

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: COOL GANGWON: GOVERNOR KIM ON TOURISM, NORTH
KOREA, CLIMATE CHANGE

Classified By: Amb. Kathleen Stephens. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Over dinner on December 22, Gangwon Province governor Kim Jin-sun and the Ambassador discussed the need for better North-South relations, the importance of tourism to Gangwon Province, and cooperating on climate change. Kim, a three-term governor who will step down in 2010, said that he disagreed with President Lee Myung-bak's current hard-line stance on North Korea. His province, in the northeast corner of Korea, contains 58 percent of the DMZ and Kim is very interested in more cross-border exchange and tourism. In order for exchange to occur, the central government should take a more conciliatory approach. The conservative Grand National Party (GNP) governor said he felt that only then could the DMZ be developed into a Peace Zone, North Korean people could be helped and his province could reap benefits from N-S tourism. He said he hoped to link the Mt. Kumgang and Mt. Sorak parks as well as develop a DMZ peace museum. Gangwon, which derives 38 percent of its GDP from tourism, is searching for a brand to lure more tourists, Kim said, and they hope to host the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. On renewable energy, Kim said that Gangwon province produces 28 percent of Korea's renewable energy and 7.4 percent of the province's energy supply was renewable. Wind power was the main renewable energy source but they also had photovoltaic plants. The Governor told the Ambassador he looked forward to hosting her in Gangwon-do and to working closely to improve the business and political relationship between his province and the United States. End Summary.

North Korea

¶2. (C) Kim Jin-sun, the GNP governor of Gangwon Province, shared his progressive stance on North Korea during a December 22 dinner with the Ambassador. Dissatisfied with President Lee Myung-bak's attempts to "tame" North Korea, Kim said that the ROK should understand the DPRK as a weak state with strong pride and therefore be more flexible in its approach. Lee should acknowledge the DPRK regime and work to improve the situation, Kim said.

¶3. (C) Observing that Gangwon Province contained 58 percent of the DMZ, Kim said he was very interested in preserving the natural beauty of the zone as well as developing further North-South cooperation across the fortified border. He hoped to link the Mt. Kumgang mountain park with the South Korean Mt. Sorak park.

¶4. (C) Kim said that the textbooks in South Korea had to be changed since the influence of the left-leaning teacher's union had affected how children thought about North Korea. According to one survey, if war broke out between the DPRK and the U.S., more children say that the ROK should side with the DPRK than with the U.S. Such absurd notions were placed in children's heads by the teachers and the distorted textbooks.

Cool Gangwon?

¶5. (SBU) Noting that Gangwon remained the least populated province with only 1.5 million people, Kim said he hoped to draw more Korean and foreign tourists to the region. The July closure of the Mt. Kumgang resort in North Korea had caused a loss of 2 million USD per month to the village of Kosung, the village in Gangwon Province where tourists would stop on their way to Mt. Kumgang.

¶6. (SBU) Key to improving tourism and other industries in the province was improved transportation links, the Governor observed. The on-going highway improvements would make it much easier to reach Gangwon from Seoul. A new highway to Gangwon's capital of Chuncheon from Seoul would make the 85 kilometer trip much quicker (currently it takes 1.5 hours) and a modern train link was also being built to connect Seoul and the east coast. (NOTE: Currently, the 230 kilometer trip takes four hours by train.) Kim said his main competition for government projects, foreign investment, and tourists was

neighboring Gyeonggi Province, which was closer to Seoul and offered similar leisure activities (skiing, hiking, golf) as well as easier access to the capital for businesses.

¶7. (C) The flagship event to promote the province would be the Pyeongchang 2018 Winter Olympics, Kim said. After failing twice to win the rights to host the games, Kim said he was confident Gangwon Province would be announced the winner in 2011. A U.S.-style theme park on the east coast would be another attraction for Koreans and foreigners alike.

Green Growth Gangwon

¶8. (C) Kim said he was very interested in developing Korea's green industries in his province and said one of the province's slogans was Green Growth Gangwon. With 28 percent of Korea's renewable energy produced in Gangwon through wind and photovoltaic power, already the province was on the leading edge, he explained. With President-elect Obama emphasizing climate change and green growth, Kim said he looked forward to finding ways to work closely with the U.S. during his remaining time in office.

G-20

¶9. (C) In a recent meeting with Lee Myung-bak, Kim said the president told him that without President Bush's support, the ROK would not have been included in the November G-20 summit.

Comment

¶10. (C) Kim is the only governor or mayor serving his third term and when his term ends in 2010, he will likely retire. That said, his considerable influence in his province, a possible Olympiad in his region, and the chance for cooperation on climate change and renewable energy mean that he could be a player outside electoral politics for years to

come.
STEPHENS